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ABSTRACT

Standardized testing, usually in the form of a multiple choice test, has dominated educational reform throughout Mississippi for the past 2 decades. Because of the minimal impact that standardized testing has traditionally had on curriculum decisions and classroom instruction, a paradigm shift in assessment format was adopted in the State from a narrow, criterion-referenced minimum competence to a broader, performance-based model. This pilot study examined teachers' perceptions of this new Mississippi Assessment System (MAS) and its extent as well as its impact on teacher judgment, modifications to classroom instruction, and non-traditional as well as traditional assessment formats. A 2-part questionnaire and teacher interviews were developed to collect both demographic and teachers' perceptions data. Participants were K-12 teachers (N=220) located in 2 small school districts in southern Mississippi. Data were analyzed using canonical correlation procedures. Results suggested that 10 demographic contributors influenced teachers' judgments, instructional change, and assessment/program evaluation. Quantitative and qualitative findings indicated that overall teacher perceptions, based on professional judgment, supported the changes in the MAS that combined traditional and non-traditional testing formats and that assessment results could help them select appropriate teaching strategies, curriculum, and educational programs. Participants also expressed a need for change in their classroom instruction to better prepare children for the new, non-traditional formats. (Contains 12 references.) (NAV)

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A Pilot Study: Teacher Perceptions Toward the Interpretation of Results from the new Norm-Referenced Portion of the Mississippi Assessment System

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Abstract

Standardized testing, usually in the form of a multiple choice test, has dominated educational reform throughout Mississippi for the past two decades. The purpose of this pilot study was to examine teachers' perceptions of the new Mississippi Assessment System (MAS), and its extent as well as impact on teacher judgement, modifications to classroom instruction, and non-traditional as well as traditional assessment formats. A two-part questionnaire and teacher interviews were developed to collect both demographic and teachers' perceptions data. Participants were 220 K-12 teachers located in two small school districts in south Mississippi.

Data were analyzed using canonical correlation procedures. Quantitative and qualitative findings indicated that overall teacher perceptions support the current changes, based on professional judgement, in the Mississippi Assessment System combines traditional and non-traditional testing formats. Participants also expressed a need for change in their classroom instruction to better prepare children for the new non-traditional formats.

Introduction

Standardized tests are traditionally perceived as scientifically developed instruments that objectively measure students' abilities, achievement, and basic skills (Neill & Medina, 1989). In recent years, standardized testing has been the impetus that has driven the selection of curriculum design, objectives, and teaching practices. Current educational research allows educators, administrators, and researchers to gain new insight with regard to the learner. With the acquisition of this information, emphasis can be placed on a student's strengths rather than the conventional practice of treating an individual's weaknesses, which is often the most common focus for traditional assessments. In addition, research has provided an awareness of current practical teaching strategies and effective instructional practices to meet the needs student's strengths and weaknesses across the curriculum.

Standardized testing, usually in the form of multiple choice tests, has dominated educational reform in Mississippi for the past two decades. Traditionally, norm-referenced tests, The Stanford Achievement Test (SAT), criterion-referenced minimum competency tests including the Basic Skills Assessment Program (BSAP) and a high school exit examination, the Functional Literacy Examination (FLE), have been administered in Mississippi to children in grades 3 through 8 and grade 11, respectively. As a result, changes in curriculum content, objectives, and design have occurred in an attempt to meet minimum state academic requirements.

Students' performances on the SAT and FLE standardized tests have commonly influenced a variety of educational areas. From individual student placement in gifted or special education programs to school district accountability measures, teachers' and administrators' academic effectiveness have been concluded by these results. Concurrently, standardized testing has

influenced curriculum content and instructional practices.

Due to the minimal impact standardized testing has traditionally had on curriculum decisions and classroom instruction, a paradigm shift in the assessment format from a narrow criterion-referenced minimum competency test to a broader performance-based model has been adopted in Mississippi. Such a modification was deemed necessary, by a committee consisting of primarily classroom teachers, due to the minimal use of data collected from previously administered standardized tests. Thus, a shift in focus from minimum competency testing to include more performance-based assessment, characteristic of logical thought processes was considered necessary. It is the researchers' belief that teachers will be influenced by such a move, which will affect teachers' judgements, alter classroom instruction and teaching strategies, and support the ultimate incorporation of non-traditional evaluation mechanisms of school wide programs.

Review of the Literature

Teachers have expressed a concern with regard to the development of extrinsic requirements which effect standards, assessment, and curriculum that corresponds with the experiences of their students. Darling-Hammond and Wise (1985) investigated teachers' understanding of policies that affect their instructional practices, the subject content, and the methods of assessment. Teachers in this study voiced strong opposition to standardized testing and its effect on curriculum, instructional practices, and content, believing that tests discourage teacher responsiveness to their students, encourage routine instruction, and fail to stimulate the pursuit of excellence or movement beyond minimal competencies. As this pilot study suggests, teachers have a desire for educational reform that will satisfy state and local requirements, but that

will simultaneously benefit their student populations.

In a study conducted by Gullickson (1984), six factors were identified that affect teachers' perceptions about standardized testing (i.e., how tests were used, and the extent of test use). In addition, the following factors were found to affect the outcome of standardized testing: a) "teachers' knowledge of tests and testing; b) the information desired by the teacher; c) student acceptance/support; d) external constraints placed upon the testing; e) the nature and quality of information yielded by the tests; and f) the way in which the teacher intends to use the test results" (Gullickson, 1984, p. 244).

In another vein, Anderson (1989) noted that most teachers surveyed did not read the report written about their students' standardized results. In fact, very few teachers use the results of standardized testing in determining classroom practices or selecting instructional strategies (Beck & Stetz, 1979; Fennessey, 1982; Stager & Green, 1986-1987; Stetz & Beck, 1978). Anderson (1989) stated that teachers perceive teacher-made assessments as more informative than data provided by an external source (e. g., standardized tests).

Some research has been conducted that concentrated on teachers' perceptions of state mandated, norm-referenced testing (Boyd, McKenna, Stake, & Yachinsky, 1975; Goslin, 1967; Stetz & Beck, 1979), but minimal investigations have been conducted that examine performance assessment or classroom assessment, or the influence that such tests have on instructional practices. Hence, a need for a study to assess the effectiveness of non-traditional standardized assessment formats as related to teachers' perceptions.

Method

Design

Given that classroom instructional strategies and state mandated curriculum decisions are based on traditional standardized test results, a questionnaire was developed based on a review of current literature to incorporate information regarding non-traditional assessment in conjunction with the preexisting traditional information. The purpose of this pilot study was to examine teachers' perceptions of the new Mississippi Assessment System (MAS), and its extent and impact on modifications to teacher judgement, classroom instruction, and school and classroom non-traditional assessment/program evaluation.

Combined quantitative and a qualitative designs, using a two-part questionnaire and teacher interviews, were developed to collect demographic data and teachers' perceptions data regarding the new non-traditional Mississippi Assessment System (MAS) format. The first part of the two-part questionnaire contained 14 items which addressed some of the following: teaching experience and grade level assignment, teachers' academic level, gender, professional affiliations, and MAS training received prior to the administration of the new assessment.

The second part of the two-part questionnaire, developed by the researchers, contained 21 questions related to teacher judgement (11 items), instruction (5), and assessment (5 items). The items contained in the questionnaire were generated from a compilation of statements made by concerned Mississippi classroom teachers and current research found in the literature. The questionnaire was distributed to teachers, with respondents marking the response that best reflected their professional opinion. A Likert scale, ranging from 5 to 1, was used to score this instrument with 5 representing "strongly agree" and 1 representing "strongly disagree." In

addition, 20 randomly selected teachers participated in an audio-taped interview, which provided the respondents with the opportunity to extend and discuss their personal views concerning the new non-traditional MAS.

Content and face validity of the questionnaire were determined by a panel of experts from the areas of assessment and curriculum. Authorities on the panel judged each item as to the degree of accuracy, clarity, and completeness as related to item abilities to assess teachers' perceptions regarding the new Mississippi Assessment System, in three categories of judgement, instruction, and assessment. The questionnaire was revised based on the recommendations of each panel member.

Subjects

Two schools located in south Mississippi within low to middle socioeconomic areas were selected for this pilot study. Participants were 20 fifth- and sixth-grade teachers from the first site, and 200 K-12 educators, including classroom teachers, specialists, and administrators, from the second site, with teaching experiences ranging from 1 to 25 years.

The investigation was conducted during the months of February and April, 1995, after the non-traditional Mississippi Assessment System (MAS) results had been distributed to all the schools participating in the statewide assessment. Most of the participants had received training in administration and interpretation of test results prior to the administration of the MAS in October. This training was offered to teachers in a variety of formats, some of which were workshops, staff meetings, and/or printed packets describing the new testing format.

Procedure

A letter of introduction with regard to the procedures and purpose of the pilot study, the

two-part questionnaire, and a copy of the interview questions were sent to the first school two days prior to the conducting of random interviews. This provided all respondents an opportunity to complete the questionnaire and peruse the interview questions prior to the interview session.

After direct contact with the school principal, two days were selected to conduct the interviews during class time at the first site. To minimize disruption of existing class protocol for the teachers participating I the interview portion of this pilot study, one of the researchers supervised/instructed the class while individual interviews were conducted by the second researcher. All participants responded to 9 open-ended questions during the interviews which lasted approximately 20-30 minutes. After obtaining permission from participants, each interview was recorded on cassette tape for review at a later time by the researchers. At the completion of the interview session, individual questionnaires were collected.

Qualitative Scoring Procedures

Audio-tapes were transcribed and the transcriptions were divided into three category codes: (a) teachers' judgements, (b) instructional change, and (c) assessment/program evaluation. A frequency total was recorded for each teacher's responses within each category. The coding method is included in Appendix A.

Quantitative Results

Correlations with Judgement, Instruction, and Perceptions

To investigate the extent to which the set of demographic (predictor) variables best predicts teachers' perceptions, (criterion) variables, a canonical correlation analysis was computed. This analysis illustrated the relationship between the demographic information and the criterion variables/teachers' perceptions; more specifically, teacher's judgements of the non-

traditional MAS scores, class/student profile scores (instruction), and assessment scores were analyzed. Only the first of the possible canonical correlations between the predictor variables and the criterion variables was found to be significant ($Rc = .536$, $p < .01$). For the significant canonical relationship, correlations between the measures and canonical variables suggested that the demographic predictors Years of Teaching, Educational Level, Grade Assigned, whether teachers thought the Workshop Training was beneficial or not, and whether or not they had received additional Staff Development, important contributors to the significant relationship.

To further investigate the relationship between the demographic variables and each of the teacher perception items, multiple regression analyses were conducted. The regression equations were designed to determine the unique effect of each of the demographic factors by first constructing full models and then removing the predictor of interest from the full model and observing the change in squared multiple correlation. Significant relationships were found for 15 of the 21 teacher perception items. The results of these analyses are presented in Table 1. The significant multiple correlations were .380 for Interpreting Scores of the MAS, .315 for Knowledge of Scores, .305 for Training of Interpretation, .392 for Selecting Appropriate Instructional Practices for the Classroom, .319 for Training to Interpretation MAS Scores, .385 Student Profile for Planning of Instruction, .368 for Class Profile for Planning of Instruction, .378 for MAS compared to Previous Assessment, .321 for Administrative Support, .338 for Evaluation of Building/Class Programs, .331 for further Staff Development, .379 for Data Usefulness in Assessing Instructional Program, .336 for Affects on Instructional Change, .346 for MAS/Classroom Assessment Formats, and .310 for Teachers' Needs Analysis. Thus, 5% to 11% of the variability in the various teacher perception items could be accounted for by the

demographic scores. The most frequently occurring significant predictors of scores on the Teachers' Judgements, Instructional Change, and Assessment/Program Evaluation were Colleague involved with the MAS, Years of Teaching, Educational Level, and Grade Taught.

Table 1
Summary and Results of Regression Analyses
Criterion

Factor	Mult. R^2	F Value	P Value
Interpret MAS scores	.380	3.198*	.001
Knowledge of scores	.315	2.083*	.05
Training for Interpretation	.305	1.949*	.05
Strategy selection	.392	3.430*	.001
Training to interpret MAS scores	.319	2.154*	.05
Student Profile for Planning of Instruction	.385	3.295*	.001
Class Profile for Planning of Instruction	.368	2.9603*	.01
Usefulness of building/class profiles	.297	1.833	.05
MAS compared to previous assessment	.378	3.151*	.001
MAS report format	.281	1.625	.05
Formats of assessments	.184	0.665	.05
Profiles for selection of teaching strategies	.282	1.635	.05
MAS/Previous assessment data for use in classroom	.293	1.786	.05
Administrative support	.321	2.180*	.02
Evaluation of building/class programs	.338	2.440*	.01
Further staff development	.331	2.336*	.01
Student grouping	.289	1.732	.05
Data usefulness in assessing instructional program	.379	3.187*	.001
MAS affects on instructional changes	.336	2.407*	.01
MAS/classroom assessment formats	.364	2.890*	.01
Teachers' needs analysis	.310	2.010*	.05

*Significant at $p<.01$

Table 2
Factor Acronyms

Teacher Judgements	MAS	
	Interpret Scores	MAS-IS
	CBD Results	MAS-CBD
	Admin/Dist	
	Training	MAS-A/D-T
	Support	MAS-A/D-S
	Usefulness	MASU
	Helpfulness	MASH
	Report format	
	Understanding	MAS-RFU
	Interpreting	MAS-RFI
	Similarity to previous assessments	MAS-RFS
	Staff development	MAS-SD
Instructional Change	Class Profiles	
	selection of appropriate instructional practices	CP-SAIP
	planning of instruction	CP-PI
	Student Profiles	
	planning of instruction	SP-PI
	Building & District Profiles	
	selection of appropriate instructional practices	BDP-SAIP
Assessment	MAS	
	Planning and diagnosis	MAS-PD
	Evaluating programs	MAS-EP
	Grouping	MAS-GR
	Strengths and weaknesses	MAS-SW
	Changes in instructional strategies	MAS-CIS
	Teachers' needs	MAS-TN

Table 3
Summary of Regression Analyses

	Criterion															
	Teacher Judgements MAS								Instructional Change Class		Instructional Change Student	Assessment MAS			
	IS	CBD	T	A/D-T	U	A/D-S	RFS	SD	SAIP	PI	PI	EP	SW	CIS	TN
Predictor	R^2_{chg}	R^2_{chg}	R^2_{chg}	R^2_{chg}	R^2_{chg}	R^2_{chg}	R^2_{chg}	R^2_{chg}	R^2_{chg}	R^2_{chg}	R^2_{chg}	R^2_{chg}	R^2_{chg}	R^2_{chg}	R^2_{chg}
Gender	.002	.000[B]	.000	.002	.003	.000	.000	.003	.002	.000	.002	.011	.005	.020[C]	.005
Years of Teaching	.012	.005	.008	.019[C]	.026[A]	.051[C]	.048[C]	.049[C]	.010	.019[B]	.037[A]	.022[C]	.005	.004	.001
Educational Level	.019[C]	.034	.029[A]	.046[C]	.011	.023[C]	.015	.007	.024[A]	.006	.000	.002	.007	.016	.007
Grade Taught	.041[C]	.008	.002	.027[C]	.009	.012	.014	.002	.004	.000	.005	.042[C]	.026[B]	.001	.026
Professional Organ.	.002	.006	.000	.011	.004	.007	.006	.000	.001	.018[B]	.005	.000	.008	.024[C]	.008
Workshop	.019[C]	.014	.027[A]	.000	.004	.012	.011	.000	.021[A]	.000	.005	.000	.003	.007	.003
Benefit	.001	.001	.001	.001	.000	.007	.007	.001	.000	.000	.015	.000	.002	.001	.002
Other Staff	.000	.001	.000	.001	.000	.000	.002	.009	.003	.000	.001	.002	.000	.000	.000
Usefulness	.024[C]	.012	.022[A]	.023[C]	.027[A]	.016	.006	.051	.035[A]	.062[B]	.015	.030[C]	.034[B]	.043	.034
Colleague involved in MAS	.009	.021[B]	.015	.031[C]	.020[A]	.025[C]	.021[C]	.008[C]	.007	.013	.055	.015	.007	.018	.813
Mult. R	.380[C]	.315[B]	.305[A]	.391[C]	.319[B]	.385[C]	.367[C]	.378[C]	.321[C]	.338[C]	.331[B]	.379[C]	.336[B]	.364[C]	.310[A]

[A] $p<.05$
[B] $p<.01$
[C] $p<.001$

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Qualitative Results

The qualitative findings focused on teachers' perceptions regarding the results of the Mississippi Assessment System (MAS), and its extent and impact on modifications to classroom instruction and school wide programs. Teachers' initial responses stated that this test format required children to write and to think critically, and allowed the children to demonstrate their ability to apply knowledge. Traditional forms of testing assessed children using a multiple choice model, which would allow the children to answer test items without having read any portion of the text; therefore, children could just "bubble in" the answers.

The new non-traditional MAS provided classroom teachers with valuable information which enabled them to identify areas of students' weaknesses and strengths in reading, mathematics, integrated language, and thinking skills. Among a few teachers (3), the primary area of weakness focused on critical thinking skills. In addition, teachers established that the new reporting format was easier to read and provided more subject specific information.

After evaluating the information from the student test profiles, teachers identified specific areas which require modification in their classroom instruction. Class programs and grade programs must include teaching strategies, which will improve students' writing skills and will address problem solving and open-ended questions. Instruction must "change to fit the test," i.e., less "skill and drill and more student writing."

Some of the participants (5) were satisfied with the information provided in the profiles. However, two teachers suggested that more specific skills and objectives should be added to the report. One teacher believed that special needs students should be identified for evaluation purposes. A few participants (3) stated that the omission of science and social studies from the

assessment was an oversight, and these subjects need to be assessed and reported on future tests. Another teacher desired expository text to be included in the MAS, as "no expository text was evaluated, just narrative text." It was suggested that teachers would benefit if the types of test questions were distributed statewide to enable teachers to fit their instruction to the assessment.

School level problems were identified by the respondents to improve communication between the local school and parents and to improve evaluation methods of students. A need for easier access to information across the grade was a specific difficulty for teachers. If each teacher was provided with profiles for the grade, it would assist in planning and instruction to meet the needs of individual students. Another participant suggested that it would benefit both the class teacher and the child if reports were kept from year-to-year to compare a student against himself or herself, as well as, comparing entire grades from one year to the next.

Most of the teachers (16) were satisfied with the training provided by the school, district, or state, believing it to be very thorough and beneficial. Some teachers (4) stated that "just a little more training is necessary," perhaps on grade level by including background information in interpreting scores and explaining the grade scoring breakdown. One participant stated that teachers might benefit from being placed in a similar test setting in order to appreciate what their students experience. Another teacher would like to see a comparison of surrounding school districts' scores, which would indicate their ranking in the local community.

Teachers expressed a desire to have the administration, district, or state assist in interpretation of these reported scores in order to build a better understanding of the MAS. More information on grading essays and designing rubrics and their uses are essential for further staff development. The third concern is in developing teaching styles and teaching techniques to meet

the needs of this method of assessment. A fourth concern addresses the need for better communication with parents and the community. Lastly, teachers perceived that further staff development is necessary to provide direction at the school level, which will assist the class teacher to plan appropriate strategies and activities for the students.

Although, there was a desire for future staff development, half the teachers (10) stated that timing is important, perhaps scheduling it at the beginning of the next academic year. Some teachers (6) expressed the opinion that adequate training had been provided; yet, they would agree to further training only if there were changes to the MAS.

Workshops were the preferred method of delivery, while inservice was the least desired. Staff development should be conducted by the local administration or staff development team, as they (the administration and the team) would understand the needs and problems within the school. A few teachers (3) had no preference in delivery, while a small number suggested that a combination of administration, district personnel, and university staff could conduct the staff development sessions, providing they were easily understood, and the participants were made to feel comfortable with the presenter(s). It was suggested that university staff should not deliver the information, as they would be perceived in "explaining it (the information) in a different way." However, in contrast, one participant stated that college professionals would understand the educational processes much better than administrators.

If further staff development is to be conducted, three suggestions were perceived as essential for success:

(a) The provision of "hands-on" activities, especially in subject areas;

(b) Opportunities for developing lesson plans that match the MAS; and,

(c) Workshops are to be scheduled at the beginning of the school year for small groups.

Participants expressed a variety of concerns regarding the new assessment system, which included: (a) students' reactions, (b) the timing of the test, (c) the reactions of parents, (d) the amount of assistance teachers offered during the exam, (e) the school's test scores, and (f) the omission of Science on the test.

Some teachers (7) stated that the children's reactions to the test format were of primary focus. Students were observed to have been "frustrated," "exhausted," or "near to tears." Teachers believed that the "students were not prepared for the test," or the children were "not ready for the writing portion of the exam." However, student reaction was not all negative. In one class, the students stated that they liked the new assessment, because it was administered "early in the year," and it (the MAS) was "shorter than the other exams."

Other concerns were expressed by individual teachers. One teacher believed that the test was given too early in the academic year, thus, not giving enough time to prepare the students for the exam. A second teacher identified the need for conferences to explain the scores and the results to parents. A third participant raised several issues regarding conferences, including who is to be conferenced, the frequency of conferences, and what activities should be given to the rest of the class while a conference is being conducted. One participant was concerned with the uniformity of directions and the amount of assistance that is permitted during the administration of the test. Further consideration regarding the test scores, especially the low scores in writing, was articulated by another teacher. The last issue was raised by several teachers (3) who were concerned with the omission of Science on the recent MAS. They questioned whether it (Science) would be included on future tests.

Two areas of concern, questions and classroom instruction, were identified as requiring modification on the MAS. One teacher stated that the test questions were unclear regarding syntax, while another believed the questions to be "too broad or too general," containing "too many generalizations." Another teacher articulated that the test did not match the skills we teach. "I'm afraid that we're not teaching students the way that we should. ...the way they're being tested."

Only two teachers stated that they will not have to modify their teaching techniques, as their instruction has included writing, higher order thinking skills, and techniques to fit differing learning styles. However, the majority of teachers (18) stated that the recent changes in the state assessment of children will change their classroom instruction. Modifications in teaching will include changes in: (a) class testing, (b) questions, (c) writing, (d) grouping, and (e) activities. Teachers' comments were as follows:

1. "It's changed my testing. I've started using more open-ended questions and more critical thinking." (4)

2. "This is the way I was taught to teach in college. I've been trying to ask more 'whys' and 'hows' in math and have been having more writing. More writing on my tests, not so much work these 30 problems. Tell me HOW you would work this problem." (2)

3. "We write our answers and explain why."

4. "I've realized I can teach the way I was taught to teach in college. This (giving explanations) relates more to what I was taught to do in college. Makes more sense to me."

5. "I do more heterogeneous grouping and cooperative grouping."

6. "...lots more hands-on, more explanation, lots more manipulatives."

7. "...need to do more writing..."

Some teachers (7) do not perceive a need for changes to be made in the reporting of class and individual information, while a few teachers (3) held no definite opinion regarding report modifications. Two necessary changes were identified at the local school level, which include time allocated for examining test results, and the distribution of results across the grade. However, some teachers (4) stated that modifications should be made to the report. One change would provide more clarity on the reverse side of the report. The second change is that reports need to be returned to local schools soon after the tests have been reviewed.

Teachers' responses to discussing the MAS results with the children's parents ranged from not "very comfortable" to "very comfortable." The most frequent response (11) was recorded as feels "fairly confident/comfortable" when discussing the results. The second group (5) was "not very comfortable;" third group (4) was "very comfortable;" and only one teacher was "a little uncomfortable" in discussing the MAS results.

Most teachers (13) did not add anything at the end of the interview. Two participants stated that the assessment (Mississippi Assessment System) was "good." Another teacher stated that the more valuable test will be next year (1995). A third teacher expressed the belief that "We (the teachers) must change our teaching."

Some teachers (4) did respond by reiterating responses from previously stated questions or adding a final concern. Reports need to be returned to local schools soon after the tests have been reviewed. The test questions require revising for clarity. Two teachers questioned whether the test format was going to be changed.

Discussions

The results of the factor analysis from the questionnaire responses revealed that there were 10 demographic contributors, those being Gender, Years of Teaching, Educational Level, Grade Taught, Professional Organizations, Workshop, Benefit, Other Staff, Usefulness, and Colleague involved in MAS, which influenced teachers' judgements, instructional change, and assessment/program evaluation. There was also a significant relationship found between the 10 factors and the 21 criterion variables used in the questionnaire with the six major contributors being; colleagues involved with the MAS, years of teaching, educational level, grade taught, workshop training, and usefulness for classroom planning and instruction. This finding would suggest that acquaintance with a colleague who was instrumental in the original developmental stages of the MAS, teaching experience, familiarity with the curriculum and students at a given grade level, attending workshops for the purpose of interpreting the new test scores, and the usefulness of standardized assessments had a direct impact upon teachers' judgements, instructional change, and assessment/program evaluation. These results, when coupled with the qualitative outcomes, appear to suggest that Mississippi teachers perceive the change in the new statewide assessment, from traditional or strictly criterion-referenced to include non-traditional, performance-based assessment, as necessary educational reform to support a change in classroom instruction and new classroom assessment formats.

Teachers' responses indicate that effective use of data collected from the MAS could assist them in selecting appropriate teaching strategies and possibly in designing appropriate curriculum and educational programs which reflect the experiences and needs of their students. According to Gullickson (1984), assessment that matches student experiences is effective in the

classroom.

It is also important to note that effective training, provided by teams of expert/knowledgeable educators, was necessary to explain not only the specific components of the new non-traditional MAS, but for the effective interpretation of the new MAS formats and results. Although, further training did not appear to be essential once teachers had received initial training. Additional research is needed, however, to determine the extent of the training regarding MAS results and use within the classroom, and the magnitude of effect that the MAS has on teaching strategies and change in curriculum design and educational programs.

Knowing a colleague who was instrumental in the developmental stages of the MAS, teaching experience, familiarity with the curriculum, and knowledge of students at a grade level were also found to be important factors with relating to the new MAS. No previous research has been conducted to support these areas, which suggests that further examination of these factors is necessary.

Limitations

A possible limitation, with regard to this study, is the disparity in sample size between site one and site. Only teachers from two grades were randomly selected from the first site, whereas, the second site random sampling involved K-12 teachers, specialist teachers, and administrators. To effectively examine the teachers' perceptions, an equivalent sample selection should be involved.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this pilot study support the fact that teachers' perceptions indicate they are receptive to a shift from traditional, standardized, norm-referenced assessment to

a non-traditional, combined format incorporating performance-based assessment. Teachers' perceptions also appear to indicate that they anticipate changes in classroom instruction, teaching strategies, and evaluation of school wide programs. As a result of the shift to the new MAS, information yielded from these assessments should provide teachers with the necessary knowledge to change their instructional practices to meet their students' needs as indicated by this pilot study.

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Appendix A

Categories for Teacher Responses Interviews*

		Perceptions	Evaluation	Change
1.	What new information have you gained about your students which was not provided by previous state assessment methods?	Application of knowledge. Test format required the children to think.	Able to identify children's strengths and weaknesses.	Teachers must concentrate on writing s
1b.	What information is not provided that could be helpful in your use of assessment results?	Need easier access to information across the grade at the school level.		
2.	How can your administration, district, or state assist you with the interpretation of theses scores?	Adequate training was provided.	Excellent staff development at the local school.	More information on grading essays an designing and implementing rubrics.
3.	Have you had training from the administration or the school district officers in interpreting the results of the assessments administered to your students?	(19) Yes (1) No		
4a.	Would further staff development build your understanding of the MAS results?	Yes, to assist in better communication with the parents and the community.		
4b.	If additional staff development activities are beneficial, what format would you recommend?	Yes, at the beginning of the next academic year.		
4c.	Since delivery is important to staff development, who would you prefer to provide assistance?	Own administration.		
5.	What concerns do you have about the new assessment system?	Student reaction to the test.	Science not tested.	Sentence syntax. Test did not match the skills taught.
6.	Have the recent changes in the state assessment of children changed the way you teach your students?			(18) Yes (2) No
7.	What changes in the reporting of class and individual information would you consider to be helpful to you as a class teacher?	(7) None	(4) Only at the school level.	(4) More clarity on the reverse side of report.
8.	If you were asked to discuss the MAS results with your parents, how comfortable would you feel?	(11) Feel fairly confident comfortable (5) Not very comfortable.	(4) Feel very comfortable. (1) A little comfortable.	
9.	Is there anything else you wish to discuss regarding the MAS?	The test was good.	Is the format going to change?	We (the teachers) must change our teac

***Coding Method:** A search was conducted through the data for main topics, while focusing on regularities and patterns in teachers' responses. Words and phrases were recorded that fit the topics, and responses were grouped and sorted according to the topic category. Whenever duplicate responses were made, the number was written in parentheses at the beginning of the comment. Only the most frequent response was included in this chart. Teachers' direct quotations were added to the document to explain the assertions made.

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